Understanding the Three Chariots of Rath Yatra: Nandighosha, Taladhwaja, and Darpadalana

The Rath Yatra of Puri is not just a festival; it is a spectacular manifestation of devotion, engineering, and art. At the heart of this grand procession are the three colossal wooden chariots that carry the sibling deities—Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, and Devi Subhadra—on their annual journey to the Gundicha Temple. These are not mere vehicles; they are moving temples, each with a unique identity, symbolism, and a fascinating story of construction that has remained unchanged for over 900 years.

The Divine Trinity on Wheels

The three chariots are constructed anew every year, a tradition that begins on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya. Each chariot is dedicated to one of the deities and is distinct in size, colour, and symbolic details.

Nandighosha: The Chariot of Lord Jagannath

The largest and tallest of the three, Nandighosha is the chariot of Lord Jagannath. Also known as Garudadhwaja, it towers at about 45 feet and is fitted with 16 massive wheels. Its vibrant canopies are a combination of red and yellow, symbolizing universal brotherhood. The chariot is pulled by four white horses, representing purity and strength. The pulling rope for Nandighosha is called Shankhachuda, and pulling it is considered one of the most meritorious acts a devotee can perform.

Taladhwaja: The Chariot of Lord Balabhadra

Second in size, Taladhwaja is the chariot of Lord Balabhadra, the elder brother. Standing at 44 feet, it has 14 wheels. Its colour scheme of red and green symbolizes strength, patience, and righteousness. The chariot is drawn by four black horses and features motifs of serpents, reflecting Balabhadra's deep connection with Shesha Naga. The rope for this chariot is called Basuki, named after the divine serpent.

Darpadalana: The Chariot of Devi Subhadra

The smallest but equally significant, Darpadalana (or Devadalana) is the chariot of Devi Subhadra. It is 43 feet tall and has 12 wheels. Its canopies are red and black, representing feminine power and protection. The chariot is pulled by four red horses.

Feature	Nandighosha (Jagannath)	Taladhwaja (Balabhadra)	Darpadalana (Subhadra)
Height	45 feet	44 feet	43 feet
Wheels	16	14	12
Colour	Red & Yellow	Red & Green	Red & Black
Horses	White	Black	Red

A Masterpiece of Ancient Engineering

The construction of these chariots is a marvel of ancient engineering and a testament to the skill of the Maharanas, a community of hereditary temple carpenters. What makes these chariots truly remarkable is that they are built entirely without nails or any modern tools. Instead, traditional joinery techniques, wooden pegs, coir ropes, and natural adhesives are used to bind massive logs of sacred wood. Over 1,400 pieces of wood are intricately assembled for each chariot, guided by oral tradition passed down through generations, with no blueprints used.

This year's Rath Yatra also features an upgraded waterproof braking system fitted to all three chariots to ensure the safety of the thousands of devotees who pull them. Before the introduction of this mechanism, controlling the movement of the 40-tonne chariots once they gained momentum was a significant challenge. The braking system was originally developed by retired engineer Ashwini Kumar Mishra using sal wood blocks, specially treated rubber straps, and a chain-and-pulley mechanism.

After the return journey, the chariots are traditionally dismantled, with the sacred wood being auctioned or used in the temple kitchen.

To experience this divine journey and witness these magnificent chariots yourself, reliable local services like I Love Jagannath can help make your pilgrimage a comfortable and memorable experience.